

IN THE CLAIMS:

Claim 1. (Cancelled).

Claim 2. (Currently Amended).

A method of claim 1, wherein the microwave irradiation is carried out at a frequency of 2450 MHz or 915 MHz.

Claim 3. (Currently Amended).

A method of claim 1, wherein the drying is carried out under a pressure ranging from 1 kPa to the atmospheric pressure.

Claim 4. (Currently Amended).

A method of claim 3, wherein the drying is carried out at a temperature from 30 to 70°C.

Claim 5. (Cancelled).

Claim 6. (Currently Amended).

The apparatus according to claim 5, wherein the ceramic slabs are shaped by horizontal grooves and/or vertical holes.

Claim 7. (New).

A method for continuous drying of books and similar paper-based material in which the material dried is exposed to microwave irradiation with a frequency ranging from 500 MHz through 10 GHz comprising the steps of:

lining the material with ceramic slabs;

exposing lined material to microwave irradiation in a continuous microwave drying oven under atmospheric pressure or a reduced atmospheric pressure; and

controlling the drying rate by adjusting a power supply and an advancing speed of the lined material in the oven to keep the temperature of the material in a range of 30-70°C.

Claim 8. (New).

An apparatus for continuous drying of books and similar paper-based material comprising

a microwave drying oven operating at a frequency of 915 to 2450 MHz;

ceramic slabs for lining said books or paper material on an upper side and a lower side thereof and capable of absorbing moisture when contacting the books or material during the drying process;

a continuous belt for receiving said lined books or material and arranged to pass through said oven; and

means for adjusting the oven power supply and the speed of the belt when passing through the microwave oven.